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September 13, 1988

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**INFORMATION MEMORANDUM**  
**S/S**

TO: The Secretary  
FROM: INR - Morton I. Abramowitz  
SUBJECT: Iraq: Status Report on the Kurds

--Saddam is determined to resolve the Kurdish problem, and probably will continue military operations aimed at stamping out pockets of Kurdish resistance regardless of the criticism from abroad.

--The military phase of Iraq's campaign against Kurdish dissidents in the northern portion of Iraqi Kurdistan appears to be winding down; military operations seem to be shifting to areas in southeastern Iraqi Kurdistan (see map). No further hard evidence of chemical weapons (CW) use has emerged since late August.

--Large numbers of Kurds have been displaced by recent military operations and the destruction of Kurdish villages. Up to 100,000 have sought refuge in Turkey and Iran, the overwhelming majority in Turkey. Only a small number of them appear to be taking advantage of the Iraqi government amnesty.

Baqhdad's escalating anti-Kurdish campaign. Saddam's determination to deal decisively with the problem of the Kurdish insurgency in northern Iraq is largely driven by the fact that the Kurds seized upon the war as an opportunity to intensify their guerrilla operations against the Iraqi government, with Iranian assistance. Masud Barzani's Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) remained implacable in its opposition to the Iraqi government throughout the war. Jalal al-Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), on the other hand, attempted in 1983 to arrive at a modus vivendi with Baghdad, but the negotiations collapsed in early 1984.

Iraqi efforts against the Kurds escalated in the wake of the resumption of hostilities between Baghdad and the PUK. The Iraqis organized in the mid-1980's large numbers of lightly armed Kurdish militia units drawn from the many Kurdish tribes loyal to Baghdad for use against the PUK and KDP. During the

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1984-85 period, the Iraqis first began razing dissident Kurdish villages, often first employing artillery and aircraft and later completing the job with bulldozers.

As the war against Iran turned more in Iraq's favor in 1987, the Iraqi government initiated its current campaign to resettle dissident Kurds in flat lands remote from their traditional mountain strongholds. In the wake of the August 1988 cease-fire, Baghdad was in a position to bring larger and more powerful forces into action against the Kurds, and the tide turned decisively against them.

The current situation on the ground. Iraqi operations against elements of the KDP located in northern Kurdistan had slowed considerably by September 9, [redacted]

Operations against the Kurds in the V Corps sector in the north reached their peak in late August and have now largely ceased.

Action appears to be shifting southeast into areas garrisoned by the Iraqi I Corps, perhaps a second phase of the campaign that began in August.

Pro-Baghdad Kurdish militia units have carried out most of the actual ground combat and patrolling activity against Kurdish dissidents. Artillery, armor and air support have been provided by regular Iraqi government forces. Regular Iraqi infantry often conduct sweeps in support of pro-government militia elements up major valleys or along main roads.

Relocation inside Iraq. Many Kurds who inhabited the mountain villages of northern Iraqi Kurdistan and supported the rebel forces have been relocated by the Iraqi government to large camps near major towns in Kurdistan, or to the south and southwest near the Saudi border. A major relocation program began in the summer of 1987, and we estimate that as many as 100,000 may have been relocated since then. BIAW

Use of chemical weapons. Interviews with refugees suggest the most recent chemical weapons (CW) use against Kurdish guerrillas and villagers occurred in late August. Burns and blisters which could have been caused by Iraqi CW attacks are in evidence on many refugees.

Kurdish casualties. No reliable casualty figures are available. Kurdish claims that Iraq has killed 20-30,000 Kurds in the recent fighting probably are exaggerated.

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Destruction of Kurdish villages. It is also not possible to tabulate how many Kurdish villages have been destroyed in recent operations or, for that matter, in all operations since 1984. As of mid-1987, we believe that as many as 500 Kurdish villages may have been destroyed. The total figure is probably considerably higher now.

Kurdish refugees. Of the four million Kurds in Iraq, probably only about 100,000 have fled the country. Most of these are KDP or PUK supporters or members of their families, or Kurds affiliated with the Turkish Kurdish dissident organization, the PKK, which has been operating from the Iraqi side of the Iraqi-Turkish border.

Refugees in Turkey. Some 60-80,000 Kurdish refugees have been admitted to Turkey in the last two weeks. The Turks had sealed the border, but relented in the face of the great numbers, and set up camps and medical facilities. The Turks are caught between their desire to gain international credit for humanitarianism and their reluctance to antagonize the Iraqis and provide any succor to Kurdish guerrillas. The Ankara regime would clearly like the Kurdish refugees to move on to other destinations for ultimate resettlement.

Refugees in Iran. Up to 15,000 Iraqi Kurds have recently found refuge in Iran. We believe that most of them are supporters of the Barzani Kurds, long supported by Iran. The Iranians initially refused to take them in, but relented under Turkish pressure. If, however, the Iraqis step up operations in the I Corps area, these refugees may be joined by many PUK supporters who would be unable to reach Turkey.

Iraq offers amnesty. On September 8 Saddam Hussein declared a general amnesty for all Kurds (except Kurdish leaders Jalal al-Talabani and Masud Barzani) who return to Iraq within 30 days. We see this as a probable public relations ploy, which most refugees, mistrustful of the Baghdad regime for good reason, probably will not accept. The Iraqis claim that 11,500 have returned; we have no way of confirming this figure.

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